

NO WINDFALL TAX ON OIL cos after new law: Hardeep Singh Puri

NEW DELHI, Mar 20 (PTI)

OIL and gas companies will not face any new taxes like the windfall profits tax after the coming into effect of a new law that promises stability of fiscal regime, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said. Parliament has passed the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Bill, 2024 that provides policy stability to investors, decriminalises provisions and promotes ease of doing business.

"After this bill, it will be difficult to levy (new taxes like) windfall tax because somebody will sue us (for failing to keep the promise of fiscal stability)," he said at a reception he hosted to celebrate the passage of the bill.

Investors looking to invest in finding and producing oil and gas want fiscal stability, and new taxes that seek to take away gains made when prices are high, without compensating for low or no margins when rates are low, are often a deterrent.

India imposed a windfall profit tax on July 1, 2022 joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. At that time, export duties of Rs 6 per litre (USD 12 per barrel) each were levied on petrol and ATF and Rs 13 a litre (USD 26 a barrel) on diesel.

A Rs 23,250 per tonne (USD 40 per barrel) windfall profit tax on domestic crude production was also levied.

The tax rates were reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. The levy was scrapped in December last year after

30 months.

Puri said global oil majors have been exploring investing in India. Brazil's Petrobras is in discussion with state-owned Oil India Ltd for exploring the Andaman basins, while Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is engaged with majors like ExxonMobil and Equinor for collaboration in deep-water exploration.

The new legislation "creates conditions for all of them (international oil companies) to come and look at India," he said.

The Bill is part of the Government's reforms



agenda to make it easier to find and produce crude oil (which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel) and

natural gas (which is used to generate power, make fertilizer or turn into cooking gas and CNG).

It decriminalised some of the provisions of the original 1948 law by introducing penalties in place of imprisonment of up to six months.

The bill introduces 'petroleum lease' and expands the definition of mineral oils to include crude oil, natural gas, petroleum, condensate, coal bed methane, oil shale, shale gas, shale oil, tight gas, tight oil and gas hydrate. This is with a view to raising domestic output and cutting reliance on imports.

India currently imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil needs and about half of its natural gas requirement.

"We have 42 billion tonnes of oil and oil equivalent reserves and a sedimentary basin spanning 3.5 million square kilometers," Puri said, adding most of it is untapped.

Negotiations underway with US for trade-deal framework: India

NEW DELHI, Mar 21 (PTI)

WITH just 11 days left for US President Donald Trump's tit-for-tat tariff to kick in, India on Friday said, its negotiations with Washington are underway to build a framework for a bilateral trade pact that would address issues relating to levies and market access.

India remains engaged with the US administration at "various levels" to arrive at a mutually-beneficial trade agreement, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. Jaiswal, however, did not directly respond to queries on whether India is expecting some kind of a waiver from Trump's reciprocal tariff that is coming into effect on April 2.

The US President indicated on Wednesday that Washington will not spare India from the new tariff regime, saying he has a "very good" relationship with New Delhi and has a "problem" with its tariff structure.

"India and the US are in the process of taking bilateral trade negotiations forward," Jaiswal said. "The two Governments are actively working to build a framework for the BTA, which would aim to expand trade, enhance market access, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepen supply-chain integration," he said. "In this endeavour, our minister visited the US from March 3 to 7 and held discussions with the US secretary of commerce and US trade representative," Jaiswal said.

Military leaders meet in Britain to discuss plans to defend Ukraine

LONDON, Mar 21 (IANS)

MILITARY chiefs from some 30 countries gathered in Britain to discuss how the so-called "coalition of the willing" might function in practice to defend Ukraine in the future.

"Everybody wants a peaceful outcome, a lasting peace, not least the Ukrainians. But that will only be lasting...if there is security arrangements in place to ensure that if there is a deal, it is a defended deal," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on

Thursday at the close-door meeting at the Northwood military base outside London.

Britain has taken a leading role in organising Western support for Ukraine alongside France after US President Donald Trump surprised Europe by initiating talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Starmer noted that previous meetings involving international political leaders had established a consensus that "we need to work together to ensure that any deal that is put in place is

defended." "What's happening here is turning that political intention into reality. The concept into the plans, whether that's in relation what might happen on the sea, air or on the ground," Starmer said.

Starmer's comments reflected the shift toward an operational phase, 'The Guardian' reported, citing a Downing Street source.

"The purpose of these security arrangements is to make it clear to Russia that any breach of an agreement will carry severe consequences," Starmer told

reporters after the meeting. "That is why US involvement will be necessary," he added.

Countries represented at the meeting included France, Poland, the Netherlands, Romania, Canada, Australia, and the United States, according to 'The Guardian.' However, the United States has so far declined to commit to supporting any Western military presence in Ukraine. The Kremlin on Thursday accused European countries of seeking "militarisation" rather than peace.

Recovery signs: Re regains 85/\$ level, sensex nears 77k

Foreign Fund Selling Eases | Fed's Steady Rate Pulls \$ Down

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

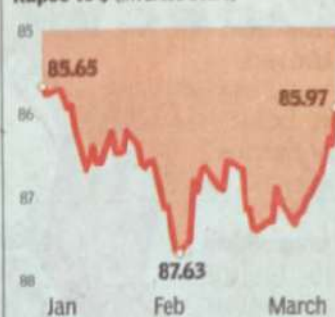
Mumbai: The rupee on Friday regained 85 level, posting its strongest gain against the dollar in over a month, supported by foreign fund inflows and the unwinding of speculative long-dollar positions. Meanwhile, the sensex and Nifty both continued their northward movements and closed higher, their fifth consecutive sessions of gains.

The rupee recorded its best weekly performance in more than two years, strengthening 1.2%. The rupee ended at 85.97 against the dollar, up 40 paise from 86.37 in the previous session, after touching a 10-week high of 85.94.

The rupee strengthened past 86 for the first time since Jan, driven by a surge in foreign investments in the domestic capital and debt markets, Dilip Parmar of HDFC Securities said. Stronger-than-expected trade data and rising forex reserves, aided by RBI's dollar/rupee swap intervention, further bolste-

GAIN AFTER PROLONGED PAIN

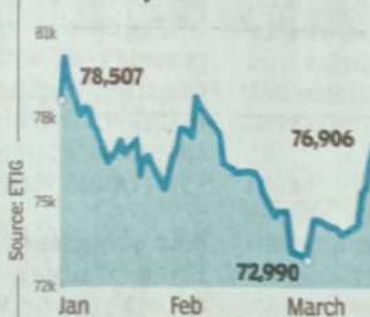
Rupee vs \$ (Inverted scale)



What lifted the the rupee?

A weaker dollar index, foreign fund inflows, and improved risk appetite drove the rupee's best week in over two years

Sensex this year



What drove the bulls on D-St?

Bargain-hunting, FPI inflows, and optimism over Fed rate cuts fuelled rally. A weaker dollar made emerging markets attractive

red the rupee. He said the local currency had emerged as the top performer among Asian currencies this month. In the near term, the rupee has support at 85.70 and resistance at 86.45. If the rupee fails to breach 85.90, it may face depreciation pressure, with immediate support in the 86.80-87.00 range.

The Fed's decision to hold

rates steady and signal lower interest rates pulled the dollar down, supporting the rupee, Jateen Trivedi of LKP Securities said.

Large foreign banks consistently offered dollars in the dollar/rupee pair. Equity inflows linked to the FTSE All-World Index rebalancing, effective from Friday, likely supported the rupee, with the re-

balancing expected to bring inflows of around \$1.5 billion.

Nifty rose 0.7% on Friday. Foreign portfolio investors, who had been selling Indian equities since late last year, turned buyers in two of the last four sessions, according to provisional data. The US economic data, including flash services and manufacturing figures due Monday will influence market sentiment.

On Dalal Street, the sensex and Nifty both opened marginally lower on Friday, after four consecutive sessions of gains, but soon reversed early trends to gain through the session. At close sensex was up 557 points to 76,906 points while Nifty was up 160 points at 23,350 points. In the last five sessions, both the indices have gained over 4% each, marking their best weekly gains in over four years.

The day's rally came on the back of strong buying by foreign funds who pumped in net Rs 7,470 crore into stocks. On the other hand, domestic funds were net sellers at Rs 3,202 crore, BSE data showed.

Sudan's military recaptures Khartoum Republican Palace



SAF soldiers celebrate after taking over the Republican Palace in Khartoum, Sudan on Friday. (AP/PTI)

CAIRO, MAR 21 (AP)

SUDAN'S military said on Friday it retook the Republican Palace in Khartoum, the last heavily guarded bastion of rival paramilitary forces in the capital, after nearly two years of fighting.

The seizure of the Republican

Palace, surrounded by Government Ministries, represents a major symbolic victory for Sudan's military against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. However, it likely doesn't mean the end of the war as the RSF holds territory in Sudan's western Darfur region and elsewhere.

Israel def min threatens to annex parts of Gaza

Jerusalem: Israeli defence minister Israel Katz threatened Friday to annex parts of Gaza Strip unless Hamas releases remaining hostages.

"I ordered (the army) to seize more territory in Gaza... The more Hamas refuses to free hostages, the more territory it will lose, which will be annexed by Israel," he said. Should Hamas not comply, Katz also threatened "to expand buffer zones around Gaza to protect Israeli civilian population areas and soldiers by implementing a permanent Israeli occupation of the area".

Katz vowed to step up the assault, using civilian as well as military "pressure points" to defeat Hamas.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military said it has killed the head of Hamas' military intelligence, Osama Tabash, in southern Gaza. There was no immediate comment from Hamas. AGENCIES

SC freezes dismissal of Shin Bet chief

Israel's Supreme Court issued an injunction Friday temporarily freezing the dismissal of the head of the domestic intelligence service as protestors returned to the streets for a fourth day. PM Benjamin Netanyahu announced last week that he had lost confidence in Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar and intended to dismiss him, prompting thousands to join demonstrations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv this week protesting the sacking, which critics saw as an attempt to undermine key state institutions. The SC ruling will allow the court to consider petitions launched against the dismissal, which was approved by cabinet late Thursday, with a decision no later than April 8, a statement published on the court's website said. REUTERS